

Hopkinton Select Board

Bates Building – Frequently Asked Questions

In October 2018, following advice from Town Counsel and after much deliberation, the Select Board unanimously made the decision to quickly move the Town Clerk/Tax Collector’s office to the Town Hall. When the decision was first made, the move was to be on a temporary basis (through at least the March Town meeting). Then during the budget process, the Select Board decided to make the move of the office permanent. Understandably, there are questions around this decision. To assure that accurate and up to date information is available, the Select Board developed this document.

INFORMATION SHARING AND GATHERING MEETING: The Select Board will hold a meeting to share and gather information on the location of the Town Clerk/Tax Collector’s office as well as uses for the Bates Building if the Town Clerk/Tax Collector is not located there. The meeting will be on Monday, February 4, 2019, 6:00 p.m., at the Town Hall (330 Main St., Hopkinton)

What are the factors the Select Board used to decide to make this move?

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES – There is a significant amount of collaboration required between the Town Clerk/Tax Collector’s office and the Assessing and Finance offices. Having all these departments in one building makes this collaboration much more efficient.

COST SAVINGS – There are costs savings beginning in 2019 with anticipated additional savings in future years. In 2019 the estimated savings is roughly \$33,700 largely through the elimination of a part time position (see below). In future years there will be additional operational savings by eliminating the need

Savings in 2019 Budget	
Part-time Position	31,291
Telephone	960
Heating Fuel	<u>1,500</u>
TOTAL	33,751

for the duplication of items such as computer servers and postage machines. The cost to heat and maintain the Bates Building will also result in savings.

CONVENIENCE OF TOWN SERVICES IN ONE LOCATION – During an extended survey at the Town Hall, consistently 2-3 people per day came to the Town Hall for services only available at the Bates Building. Sometimes people were just in the wrong building, and sometimes people needed the services of both buildings. Often someone needs a tax card (Assessing) and a copy of their tax bill (Tax Collector). Now that can be done in one place.

SAFETY AND SECURITY OF EMPLOYEES – Even with three staff members at the Bates Building, there were times that one person was alone in the building. This is not ideal especially for the office where money is collected. The combined staffs at the Town Hall assures that no one is ever alone in the building.

BATES BUILDING BACK ON THE TAX ROLES – The Town does not have a need at this time for the Bates Building, and there is no anticipated need in the future, so the building can be sold and added back on the tax role and generate tax revenue.

Was this decision made quickly?

Yes and no. There has been discussion around this move for at least 5 years with no decision being made. Due to reasons that can't be discussed publicly, the office had to be moved this fall. Because this had to happen right away the decision was a temporary one at that time. After the move and further review during the budget process, the decision was made to make the move permanent.

How can the part-time position be eliminated?

There are two reasons for the ability to eliminate this position, more people in the building, and efficiencies that have been added to the office. For security reasons, the offices required three people to minimize how often one person was alone in the building. Several office efficiencies are in the process of being implemented now. Upgraded integrated software will create better reporting and simplify what must be done for each customer. The need to write more than one check to register your car will be eliminated. It will also allow for the use of credit/debit cards for the registration of cars and other Town Clerk functions. Working with our bank who has provided a check scanner, we will now be able to scan checks to deposit them. Between this and the addition of the acceptance of credit/debit cards, the need to go to the bank will be dramatically decreased.

Is there enough parking at the Town Hall?

While there is a plan in place to improve parking and access at the Town Hall, parking is generally working most of the time since the move. Staff is parking by the cemetery, on the street, or in the St. Andrew's parking lot thanks to an agreement with them. This leaves open the spaces in front of the building and is a manageable situation for now.

Can we sell the Bates Building? I thought it had restrictions on it.

The land and funds to build the Bates Library was donated to the Town to be used as a library. In 1999 the Town received permission to use the building for town purposes. The Select Board is working to assure that the wishes of the donor are followed, and the Town has the flexibility needed to move forward. The Charitable Trust Division of the NH Attorney General's Office has

agreed to support the selling of the building with half the proceeds going to the library with the other half being used to accomplish needed renovations at the Town Hall. Probate court approval will be required. The lot the Bates Building is on includes the bandstand and the municipal parking area, so a subdivision will have to happen requiring Planning Board review. Also, Town Meeting approval is required to sell the building.

Aren't the town archive records kept at the Bates Building?

Currently the town archive records are held in a concrete room in the basement of the Bates Building. Basements are not the best place to keep archives, and there is some space at the Town Hall if needed. The Select Board is putting in place a Town Records/Archive Committee which will include someone from the Town Clerk's Office and other departments that have permanent records, as well as people with some expertise with records storage. They will make recommendations as to the best storage of records.

Is anyone still located at the Bates Building now?

The Supervisors of the Checklist are the only ones currently located at the Bates Building. The Select Board has met with the Supervisors and is committed to assuring that there is secure space for their records and supplies, as well as adequate space for them to work. Some relatively simple modifications to the Town Hall will accommodate their needs (see below).

Will extensive renovation be required to the Town Hall to accommodate this additional use?

Currently the offices are all functioning fine since the move. Minor renovations could be done to remove the many walls in the Planning Department to make a conference room that could be used for a small meeting at night, as well as during the day and could be used by the Tax Collector to have private meetings when needed. This space could also be used by the Supervisors of the Checklist when needed. If, in the distant future additional space is needed, the upstairs could be renovated into a large meeting room and additional space could be used downstairs.